

Fact Sheet 3

Bloodsworth Island Range

Natural Resources



What natural resources are prevalent within Bloodsworth Island Range?

Bloodsworth, Pone, Adam and Northeast islands ("Bloodsworth Island Range") are a natural habitat for a variety of bird species. Some birds that are commonly found at Bloodsworth Island Range include wading birds, shorebirds, raptors and songbirds.

Many of these birds are found year round; however, both rails and shorebirds use the range more extensively during migratory season. Rails are a fairly important resource on the range due to the extensive marsh habitat. While the Clapper Rail is clearly the most common resident rail (both breeding and over-wintering), the range also hosts migrating King, Virginia, and Sora Rails.

Bloodsworth, Pone, Adam and Northeast islands support very few mammalian species, reptiles, or amphibians relative to the mainland. The lack of diversity in plant species and potential mates, coupled with the unavailability of fresh water, have proven to be the primary factor for the relatively unsuccessful habitation of the few mammalian species historically observed on the island.

How has the Navy demonstrated its environmental stewardship?

With the transfer to Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River, Bloodsworth Island Range has gained one of the Navy's leading Natural Resource Offices as an ally. Both the environmental and natural resource programs at NAS Patuxent River are leading proponents for the integration of ecological considerations into all aspects of test and evaluation activities and training exercises.

NAS Patuxent River has a strong record in



Great Blue Heron nesting platform on Bloodsworth, top.

Erecting heron nesting platforms on the Bloodsworth Island Range, middle.

An Osprey takes flight on Bloodsworth.

Photos provided by NAS Patuxent River Natural Resources Division.

natural resource protection and management.

Its natural resource program for Bloodsworth Island Range is being developed with input from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources and other environmental organizations. The program also ensures compliance with all applicable federal and state natural resource laws and regulations.

One example of the Navy's stewardship is the management of the large Great Blue Heron rookery on the northern part of Bloodsworth Island. In the early 1980s, the Navy noted a decline in the number of nesting pairs of heron. The decline was due primarily to the deterioration of nesting habitat, namely the loblolly pines and other trees. These trees were dying due to a rise in water level and the resulting increase in soil salinity. In response to this decrease in potential nesting sites, the Navy constructed nesting platforms to provide alternative nesting sites.

There are currently 19 poles with four to six nesting platforms per pole. In October 1997, there were 57 heron nests on these platforms. In September of 2001, a survey was conducted and confirmed that the nests on the platforms are still being used, and were occupied during the 2001 nesting season. Additionally, there were many nests contained in the remaining trees on the island.

The Navy designated the Northern portion of Bloodsworth Island as a "No Fire Area" to protect the heron rookery. Since 1965, the range has been closed to any type of firing during migratory bird seasons, usually from October through mid-February, to protect migrating birds and over-wintering waterfowl.

Additionally, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy signed a teaming agreement with the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks of the Department of Interior and the Assistant Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources in April 1991. This voluntary agreement established management efforts to perpetuate the survival of North American Waterfowl at Bloodsworth Island Range.

Are there any endangered species or other wildlife at Bloodsworth Island Range that could be threatened by training/testing at the island?

Currently, there are no known endangered or threatened species that inhabit the islands. As required by the Endangered Species Act, the Navy consults with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries (formerly known as the National Marine Fisheries Service) whenever one of its proposed activities could have the potential to impact a federally-listed species.

Previously, during the planning of a proposed activity, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources indicated the presence of a pair of Peregrine Falcons (a federally-listed endangered species) and a Bald Eagle nest (a federally-listed threatened species) within or near the islands.

The Peregrine Falcons nested and incubated eggs in a box on a spotting tower on Adam Island during the spring and summer of 1997. Two Peregrine Falcon chicks hatched and presumably fledged from the nest. To ensure that the pair did not nest at this exact location again, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service requested that the nesting box be removed. Through coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Navy relocated the box to Spring Island in February of 1998. This pair has been very successful at their new location, most recently producing two young in the 2000 nesting season.

The closest Bald Eagle nest is on the northern tip of Holland Island. The last observed activity at the nest occurred in 1994. Although current military operations do not affect these threatened and endangered species, with the introduction of any new activities, NAS Patuxent River will assess any possible effects on all wildlife.

What is the Navy's responsibility to protect threatened and endangered species and other wildlife?

The Navy is required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a federal regulation that requires all federal organizations to take environmental, safety and health considerations into account in the planning phases for all future operations and activities. NAS Patuxent River has taken a proactive approach to this regulation by completing an all-inclusive, facility-wide Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

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The Final Environmental Impact Statement, Increased Flight and Related Operations in the Patuxent River Complex,

December 1998 was the first of its kind for any federal facility. In addition to the Endangered Species Act, this EIS addresses a wide variety of environmental regulations that ensure species survival and success. Since Bloodsworth Island Range was not a part of NAS Patuxent River at the time of the EIS development, it was not included in the NAS Patuxent River EIS.

NAS Patuxent River will assess the environmental impacts of future activities and operations at the range for subsequent EIS revisions. Even though Bloodsworth Island Range operations do not require NEPA documentation at this time,

NAS Patuxent River is proactively working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that the Navy meets its responsibility to protect threatened and endangered species. The Navy takes this responsibility very seriously, as illustrated by NAS Patuxent River erecting nesting towers on Bloodsworth Island, to further enhance heron survival and reproduction.

Although, the Endangered Species Act does not address non-threatened wildlife, the Navy has the responsibility to ensure protection and enhancement of all wildlife to the greatest extent practical in concert with the military mission.

How have the ecological habitats at Bloodsworth Island Range been impacted by naval operations?

When the Navy acquired Bloodsworth Island Range in 1942, the best available data indicated that the largest island, Bloodsworth, was approximately 97 percent wetland and 3 percent upland composition. Recent studies show that this composition exists today.

The most notable changes on the range since 1942 are the man-made craters and the absence of trees. The man-made craters are a direct result of previous operations on the islands and have actually proved beneficial by evolving into a resource for the wildlife inhabiting and visiting the island.

Although trees were never plentiful, the primary reason for the disappearance of trees on Bloodsworth Island Range is believed to be due to rising sea levels and the subsequent increase of soil salinity. This finding was further substantiated by a 1980 study performed by the Maryland Wildlife Administration. The Navy recognizes, however, that previous operations did have an impact on the habitat; although, the most dramatic vegetation changes, the decline in trees, had already occurred on Bloodsworth Island Range before the Navy acquired it.



Osprey chicks on nest. Photo provided by NAS Patuxent River Natural Resources Division.